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ABSTRACT

Resource-based learning (RBL) is one of the most useful, successful, and acceptable approaches to curriculum delivery, easily adapted to different styles of teaching and learning. It brings together all of the resource elements--tutor, learning resources, and student--into a learning partnership. Two essential aspects of RBL are its flexibility--that is, its ability to cope with a variety of learning styles--and its promotion of student autonomy. The introduction of RBL has practical implications for further education colleges (technical institutes). Students need to develop more autonomy in the way they study and use information, through guidance from tutors. Tutors need to develop technical, human, and conceptual skills to be able to empower students with autonomy. A framework of learning resources and space in which to use them is needed to support students and tutors, upon which students can rely for all their learning needs. The college library is central to the learning process as the provider of a wide-ranging service based on a comprehensive collection of fully integrated learning resources. The issues and problems related to the implementation of RBL are partnership, quality issues, staff development, student autonomy, learning resources framework, technology of delivery, introduction and use of forms of RBL, and provision of RBL guides. Each requires a strategy to deal with it involving tutors, nonteaching staff, students, and senior college management. (Appendixes include 20 references and sample 5-year strategic plan for a further education college.) (YLB)

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Mendip Papers

The management of resource-based learning

J Cooper

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Acknowledgements

This paper started out as a dissertation for the Certificate in Further Education Management under the direction of Blackburn College and the Further Education Management Unit. I should like to thank my supervisor, Ron Mitson, for his patience and guidance. I am also grateful to Jim Cunningham for reading and commenting on the text, and for interesting and valuable conversations with Richard Downing of the Polytechnic of West London. Finally I should like to thank Liz Rice and the senior management of Blackburn College for giving me the opportunity to follow through my thoughts in a structured way.

Introduction

The intention of this paper is to deal with the management implications of resource-based learning (RBL) by identifying the issues and presenting them in such a way that strategic plans can be drawn up for future action. It is based in part on a small case study of an individual college which is going through this process, but the issues and concepts can be applied to any college.

Further education is in the middle of enormous changes: independence from local education authorities, the desire to become increasingly efficient and effective in terms of student achievement, and the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications across the whole course portfolio, including the accreditation of prior learning/achievement (APLA) and modularisation of courses. All these factors have made it necessary to examine every aspect of delivery (as well as

every other aspect of the college). The intense inward scrutiny of colleges into such things as quality of provision and increased efficiency is matched by an outward scrutiny for sources of finance and spheres of influence.

Further education is labour intensive: a college requires a member of staff (teaching and non-teaching) for every eight or so full-time equivalent students (FTEs). With pressure for efficiency, this figure must be examined, both in terms of staff:student ratios (SSRs) and of class contact time, so that there can ultimately be a reduction in the number of tutors. However, because the bulk of the college income depends on the number of students (and will probably continue to do so), the college needs to recruit as many students as possible. The resulting formula is a conundrum for senior managers, particularly if traditional methods of curriculum delivery are to prevail.

In addition to the changing financial issues there are new curriculum issues emerging, particularly the introduction of modular curricula and APLA. Modularisation and accreditation of prior learning both require a flexibility of approach that most colleges are ill-prepared to take on. This will lead to colleges considering the introduction of other more flexible ways of delivering the curriculum (Further Education Unit, 1991; particularly the section 'Flexible access to learning'). Resource-based learning is one of the most useful, successful and acceptable approaches, easily adapted to different styles of teaching and learning.

Resource-based learning is not a panacea for all the problems associated with 'standard' curriculum delivery; it is not intended as a replacement for the classroom, but as an alternative complementary method of delivering the curriculum. The best any educational establishment can do is to provide the students with alternatives that meet their learning needs.

Resource-based learning is a way of organising and delivering the curriculum in a flexible but controlled way, taking into account student learning styles. It is client (student) centred, and operates on the premise that learning is performed by individuals who can learn how to learn. As part of this, they must learn how to handle and use information appropriately, so that they can retrieve information, assess its value and accuracy, understand relationships between areas of knowledge, and use it in relation to a predetermined course.

> If students are to learn actively then they will need material to learn from. Providing this material may involve: alternative forms of library provision, both in terms of learning material and learning spaces; the production of specially prepared printed material, audio-visual and computer packages; the development of students' information and research skills, and mechanisms for greater sharing of resources between students.
> (Gibbs 1990, p14)

The effect on tutors of introducing RBL will be apparent. They will need to become facilitators and enablers of learning, so that students can use them in a flexible way: for consultation on the subject (i.e. as a learning resource in themselves) as well as a guide to and critic of other learning resources available. In terms of 'lesson' preparation, there will also be a '...need for thorough preplanning, careful self-criticism and a clear elaboration of what will happen in the case of all foreseeable alternatives' (Beswick 1977, p167)

RBL, then, is a pulling together of all the resource elements – tutor, learning resources and student – into a learning partnership, with equal respect for each other's contribution.

Another useful definition of RBL comes from the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA):

> Learning systems [i.e. a combination of elements organised to enable a student to reach his or her objectives] which depend wholly or in part on the use by students of learning resources.... Resource-based learning may range from highly structured systems in which the student's path is predetermined and the resources used explicitly defined and ordered, to systems in which the student is encouraged to learn through an exploration of an extensive collection of unstructured resources.
> (CNAA 1975, p21)

Or, to simplify the definition, it 'will be learning based on the use of materials selected and, maybe, designed and produced, to meet specified goals' (Clarke 1982, p27).

Two essential apsects of RBL need to be examined first before looking at its implications and implementation: its flexibility and student autonomy.

Flexibility

One of the greatest advantages of RBL is its ability to cope with a variety of learning styles: it can cater for those students who prefer the classroom as well as those who prefer total autonomy (even, in some cases, if they are on the same course). The intention is that students have options and can relate their own time, place and pace of working to their needs. There are different methods of RBL delivery, including the project or assignment, supported self study and others (Waterhouse 1988).

Due to its flexibility, RBL also relates to different types of curriculum framework, so that modularised curricula are easily accommodated, as is the pursuit of the theoretical input for the accreditiation of prior learning/achievement and similar curricula.

Student autonomy

It must always be borne in mind that, in the words of Smith (1983, p65), 'the current pressures towards self-directed learning and fostering of self-directed learners are well intentioned and potentially useful but also simplisitic...(1) interdependence and even dependence can be as functional as independence and autonomy, (2) different modes of learning require differing degrees of autonomy, and (3) there is potential danger in confronting learners with the responsibility for exercising more autonomy than experience or training have prepared them to exercise.'

Both tutors and senior managers should give careful consideration to how autonomous the students are expected to be. Autonomy can be seen as having a number of dimensions:

- management of their own learning and understanding their own ability to learn;
- acquiring appropriate information through learning resources (including human resources);
- knowledge and skills acquisition;
- obtaining and using appropriate emotional support.

(Candy 1988, pp70-1)

But it is important to understand that student autonomy is about self-reliance and interdependence:

> The aim of autonomous learning...is not normally for students simply to become learners who are individualistic or work on their own. Autonomous approaches do not imply treating learners in isolation from one another. What is usually sought is that students become interdependent learners, working with and helping each other.
> (Boud 1988, pp28-9)

The advantages of creating more autonomous students are obvious: students who are unable to cope with autonomy or who rely completely on instruction and guidance are not easily going to become effective, autonomous adults.

> It is not likely that students who are dependent on their teachers are going to be as effective in the world of learning or subsequent employment as those who have developed strategies which enable them to find and use their own resources for learning.
> (Boud,1988, p.21)

It is, therefore, important for tutors to accept the need for more autonomous students, and to teach students how to study. This will enable the students to cope: it builds their confidence and their skills so that they can cope not only with the subjects they are studying, but also with the challenges of life itself. Given more autonomy, students are more motivated, and therefore create a momentum which makes it more likely that syllabuses will be covered; an issue that worries many tutors.

> We had four groups taking modules in Earth Sciences. Two used flexible learning and two worked with more teacher direction. The outcomes of tests showed that the flexible learning groups achieved a significantly higher success rate. Students were more motivated and the quality of the work presented was higher than was predicted.
> (quoted in Wright, 1991)

Generally, motivation is increased because the students have the freedom to act and work as they choose:

> Students work hardest on independent projects, claim to enjoy them most and to have learnt most from them.
> (Downing 1991, p6)

There is also enormous enhancement of the skills of decision-making, problem-solving, planning, and other 'transferable' skills.

There is no doubt that some students will be reluctant to take the steps towards more autonomy: they have, after all, been through an education system which has been, on the whole, repressive and didactic. More 'freedom' may also seem counterproductive to tutors because of the 'discipline' problems that are expected to arise. Even though RBL increases motivation generally, the student's own personality, abilities and desire to be more autonomous are highly significant and influential factors. Students, therefore, should preferably be presented with choices of the most appropriate method of learning for them.

To summarise, Beswick (1977, pp.96-8) neatly enumerates the hopes and aspirations of RBL:

> 1. RBL hopes to replace the essential passivity of the student in class teaching with an active learning mode stimulating interest and involvement;
>
> 2. RBL hopes to increase student motivation by presenting varied possibilities, of subject matter, method of working, and medium of communication, in contrast to the class lesson where all must learn one thing in one way;
>
> 3. it hopes to allow, and induce, students to work at the pace best suited to them as individuals, rather than having to proceed at the standard class rate;
>
> 4. it hopes to allow for more flexible use of time and available spaces, both within subjects and between subjects;
>
> 5.RBL aims to make fullest use of all available sources for information and stimulus, as 'learning resources' as well as simply 'teaching aids', and provides the opportunity to plan learning activities fully with this in mind;
>
> 6. RBL hopes to be able to respond more imaginatively to changes in attitudes towards authority;
>
> 7. RBL seeks to contribute towards the development of self-confidence and ability in continuing education;
>
> 8. RBL seeks to give the student insight into the wide range of information sources, and practice in their creative deployment.

The next section looks at the practical implications across the college of the introduction of RBL.

Implications across the college

Implications for students

The most profound implications will be for the students themselves: how they cope with what is expected of them. A radical change of approach from what most of them have been used to is required. The students need to understand how they learn, so that they can manage their own learning; they need to learn how to learn. To quote Smith (1983, p17) this means understanding learners' needs (what learners need to know and be able to do for success in learning), learning style (a person's highly individualised preferences and tendencies that influence his or her learning), and training (organised activity, or instruction, to increase people's competence in learning).

RBL cannot operate unless the students have some understanding of their role, and skills to cope with their own level of autonomy.

> At the low-autonomy end of the spectrum, students need to possess certain skills in learning if they are to be able to go 'beyond the information given' and do more than regurgitate and reproduce low-level cognitive knowledge. Similarly, at the highly autonomous end, students need to have developed skills in self-organisation to be able to operate effectively in such an open environment.
> (Boud 1988, p24)

If students are to be considered part of the partnership involving tutors and learning resources, which of course they should, then they have a role to play, usually as part of their peer group in emotional support and providing some information. The introduction of RBL therefore relies on the student being more autonomous in their learning behaviour.

The main characteristic of autonomy as an approach to learning is that students take significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction. Such an approach might involve students taking the initiative in any or all of the following:

- identifying learning needs;
- setting goals;
- planning learning activities;
- finding resources needed for learning;
- working collaboratively with others;
- selecting learning projects;
- creating 'problems' to tackle;
- choosing where and when they will learn;
- using teachers as guides and counsellors rather than instructors;
- opting to take additional non-teacher-directed work, such as learning through independent (structured) learning materials;
- determining criteria to apply to their work;
- engaging in self-assessment;
- learning outside the confines of the educational institution, for example in a work setting;
- deciding when learning is complete;
- reflecting on their learning process;
- making significant decisions about any of these matters, that is, decisions with which they will have to live.

(Boud1988, p23)

The manifestations of these characteristics in student behaviour is that s/he will be:

> (i) wondering and asking, with a sense of the right to ask, what the justification is for various things which it would be quite natural to take for granted;
>
> (ii) refusing agreement or compliance with what others put to him [her] when this seems critically unacceptable;
>
> (iii) defining what he [she] really wants, or what is really in his [her] interests, as distinct from what may be conventionally so regarded;
>
> (iv) conceiving of goals, policies and plans of his [her] own, and forming purposes and intentions of his [her] own independently of any pressure to do so from others;
>
> (v) choosing amongst alternatives in ways which could exhibit that choice as the deliberate outcome of his [her] own ideas or purposes;
>
> (vi) forming his [her] own opinion on a variety of topics that interest him [her];
>
> (vii) governing his [her] actions and attitudes in the light of the previous sort of activity.
> (Dearden 1975, p7)

This may seem like an unattainable ideal, and in many respects it is. But there are practical methods that enable the student to go a fair way down the road to autonomy and achieve successful results in examinations. One such method is supported self study (SSS). Although fairly restrictive in the degree of autonomy that can be exercised by the student, particularly in its relation to information skills, it has a useful approach to control – through negotiated contracts – and support through tutors and small working groups. It is, therefore, one of the most powerful structured systems available at present, and has enormous potential for expansion and refining (see Waterhouse, 1988, for a full summary of SSS as presently conceived).

The most usual form of RBL at present is the project or assignment. Some of the problems associated with projects arise from the lack of control and the lack of support, particularly while the project is being compiled.

Frequently the students are 'thrown in the deep end', and expected to provide a well researched and produced project with a minimum of input on information, time management, or other study skills.

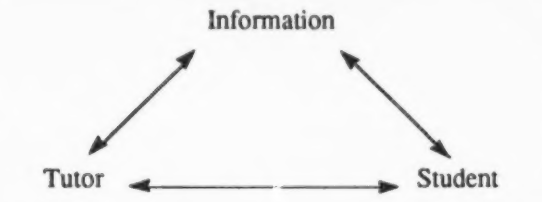
Implications for tutors

There is no doubt that the introduction of RBL will have profound repercussions on the role of the tutor, and consequently a change in attitudes and behaviour will be required. Tutors need to see themselves as one element of the tripartite partnership referred to above. It is anticipated that tutors will feel reluctant to relinquish their role as the provider or gatekeeper of the information transmitted to the students. Perhaps the first step, therefore, is to change the role

of the tutors so that they no longer perform as gatekeepers to the knowledge and information that the student has access to. In the majority of cases the following is the present situation:

Information ——→ Tutor ——→ Student

If RBL is to be successful there needs to be a constant dialogue between all three:



The role of the tutor in managing an RBL assignment is to work with the students to help them accomplish their learning goals. For successful management of the assignment, the tutor needs three skill areas:

- technical skills: the ability to use knowledge, methods, techniques and equipment necessary for the performance of specific tasks acquired from experience, education and training;
- human skills: the ability and judgment in working with and through people, including an understanding of motivation and an application of effective leadership;
- conceptual skills: the ability to understand the complexities of the overall organisation and where one's own operation fits in. (Higgs 1988, p56)

Tutors must become the managers of learning by developing and structuring programmes that empower the students, through a range of approaches, to learn from experiences outside the classroom (as well as in the classroom if necessary). This will free the tutor and students from the constraints of classroom space and dynamics into the real world of problem-solving, decision-making and other skills which help them cope.

Downing (1991, p18) cites four practical roles of the tutor:

1) developing [and structuring] the learning programme and objectives;
2) acting as a learning resource by imparting information;
3) the provision of other learning resources for students (usually by purchase or in-house production);
4) the evaluation and assessment of the learning programme and the student's learning.

Staff development of the various skills required by tutors would, therefore, seem to be an essential prerequisite for successful RBL. It needs to be practical rather than theory-based, using interactive workshop sessions and drawing on appropriate expertise.

Implications for educational management

A move towards RBL throughout the college will mean decisions being made by college management that will be unpopular with those who favour traditional approaches to curriculum delivery (and that does not exclude the college managers themselves).

The introduction of RBL may also, of course, create problems in some areas, and produce negative side effects that require positive and realistic action. For example, discipline problems may arise from giving students more autonomy but little increase in purposefulness (perhaps created by tutors unable to cope with RBL) that require an understanding of behaviour management, and specifically how to deal with each situation. These problems should not distract from, and must not affect any strategy and action plan that has been produced for, the implementation of RBL.

The main issues that face college management seem to be:

- the RBL framework within the college;
- the technology of the college system; and
- efficiency and staffing ratios.

Other issues are referred to elsewhere, including staff development.

RBL is a wide-ranging, flexible way of delivering the curriculum, and it is therefore important to consider the types of learning resources that may fit in to the RBL framework. Some areas provide few problems in being directly associated with RBL, such as libraries and learning workshops. Other areas, where student access is restricted at present, may be more contentious, such as cross-college (and faculty) audio-visual and computer facilities, media centres, specialist classrooms, engineering workshops, and similar areas. Of course learning resources can also include, for the sake of RBL, tutors, peers and other people. If there is to be a meaningful framework for RBL, then all (or at least most) facilities need to be available to the students, as far as possible when they need them, although obviously some areas will need close control, and should only be used if they are applicable to the course the students are taking. Depending on how RBL is organised and what frameworks are set up, this will require complicated timetabling of facilities, unless a large number of areas are made specifically for drop-in purposes.

College technology

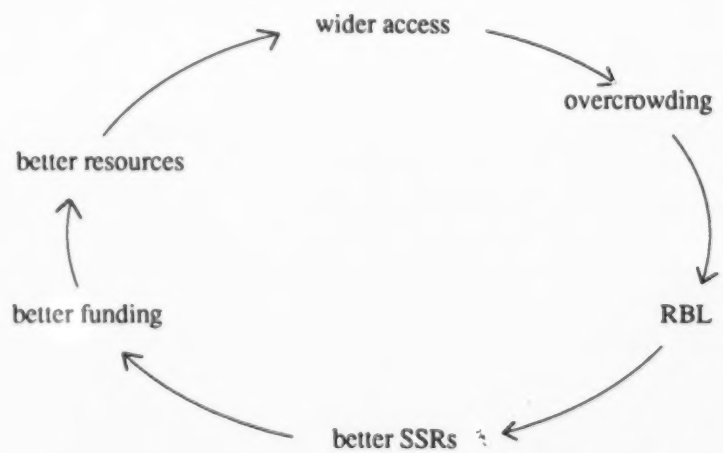
This brings us to a consideration of the 'technology' (management term), a contextual variable of college structures, including the way space and staff are utilised. Without getting too deeply into this, some explanation is required. Technology is the way systems operate. Bureaucratic structures tend to be rigidly hierarchical and have difficulty in adapting or responding quickly to environmental issues and pressures. In college terms, they are also orientated to serving the needs of the dominant group (the lecturers and college management), rather than considering the best way of 'processing' the students. Changing the technology is very difficult, and any rigid hierarchical structure does not lend itself to manipulation. This is a severe constraint on RBL, and therefore on the best utilisation of space and staff to serve the needs of flexible learners (i.e. creating fewer classrooms, and more drop-in facilities).

Efficiency and staffing ratios

Another management implication is that colleges can increase their overall SSR level by using RBL, since many RBL facilities can hold considerably more students than a classroom. Tutors are, therefore, able to deal with more students at a time, as they will only be dealing with student problems as they arise. RBL can therefore be seen as a strategic response to overcrowding, without increasing staffing costs. This in turn increases the SSRs, and the college's efficiency. This then creates wider access to learning opportunities (see **Figure 1**).

To summarise this section, students need to develop more autonomy in the way they study and utilise information, through guidance from tutors. Tutors need to develop technical, human and conceptual skills to be able to empower students with autonomy. A framework of learning resources, and space in

Figure 1: Management implications of commiting to RBL



which to use them, is needed to support students and tutors, upon which they can rely for all their learning needs.

The next section examines issues of marketing and quality which have a bearing on the successful introduction of RBL into colleges.

Marketing and quality issues

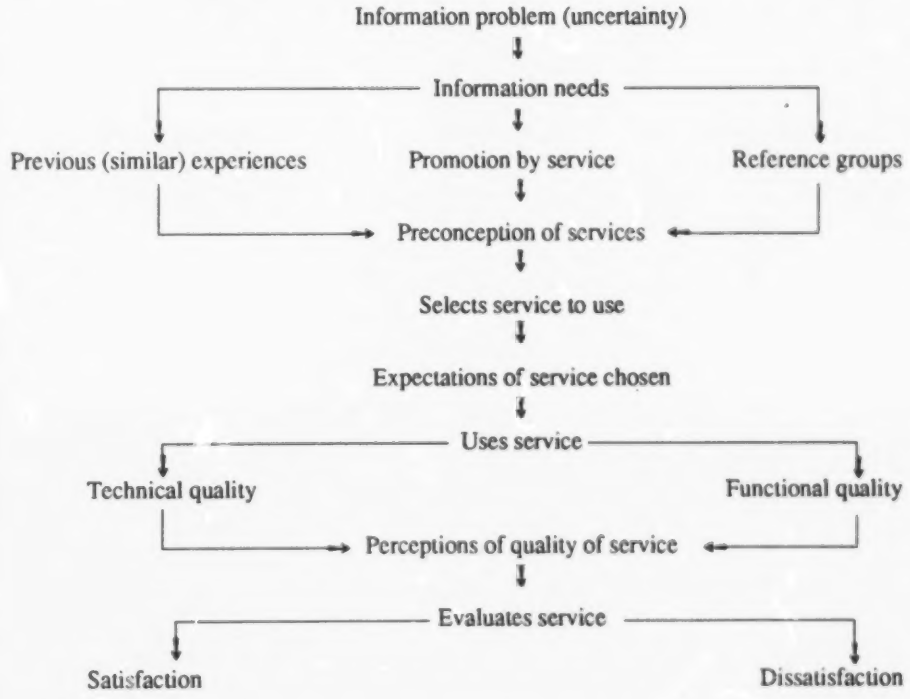
The quality of a service is essentially the relationship between what is performed by the service and how closely it relates to the objectives and goals of the organisation. But the goals need to be related to client needs, since it is the client who ultimately evaluates the quality of a service. There need, therefore, to be internal quality checks, available for scrutiny by those with a legitimate interest in the service, in the form of performance indicators and close scrutiny of processes and structures. External checks with clients in whatever form is appropriate, such as questionnaires, are also needed.

The debate about which are the most appropriate performance indicators has gone on for some years. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA 1990, p6) identify the following characteristics of sound performance indicators:

- they must relate to the stated objectives of the organisation;
- they must be specific, quantifiable and standardised so that the information can be used for making valid comparisons within and between institutions;
- they must be as simple as possible and consistent with their purpose;
- they must be acceptable and credible in the sense of being free from systematic bias;
- they must be useful and capable of acting as signposts to areas where questions concerning operations can and should be asked.

No RBL system will work unless there is a thorough understanding of the students' needs, the processes and structures through which they work, and a system for evaluating their effectiveness. As an example, **Figure 2** (based on Cooper 1987, pp21/

Figure 2: Information seeking and quality



Adapted from Cooper (1987) **Models for change: learning resources centrality and St Helens College Library**

66) shows the process through which a student may go from having an information problem (uncertainty), through using a service (e.g. a college library) to find answers to the problem, to their own evaluation of the service.

The diagram illustrates a situation whereby a student needs to find out some information. From a situation of total uncertainty, they will formulate their information needs and then consider ways of finding the answers. Using a combination of previous knowledge about information services (and other sources of information), they will draw upon previous similar experiences, which may be based on the depiction of services in the media or actual use of the services, and any promotion by the service that they may have come into contact with (leaflets, advertisements, training in how a service operates, etc.). Reference groups (peer group, lecturers, family etc.) also help to influence perceptions. All these influences will provide the student with a set of (often erroneous) pre-conceptions about the services being considered.

At this point students will need to make a selection of the service they think will best serve their needs and provide answers to the problem. Having made the selection, the student will have certain expectations of that service; not just that it will provide the answers. Research by Berry and others (1988, p37) suggest there are five areas of expectation:

- tangibles: the physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel;
- reliability: the ability to perform the desired service dependably, accurately and consistently;
- responsiveness: the willingness to provide prompt service and help customers;
- assurance: employees' knowledge, courtesy and ability to convey trust and confidence;
- empathy: the provision of caring, individualised attention to customers.

Technical and functional quality

This is depicted in **Figure 2** as technical and functional quality. Technical quality is the actual outcome from the use of the service; i.e. through a convenient and easy to use service the student finds the answers to the information problem. Functional quality is based on the performance of the service, such as interaction between the student and the service staff, the decor and atmosphere, and other psychological and non-material aspects.

From use of the service, students will gain certain perceptions of the quality of the service, and then evaluate the service in terms of their own satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The most important element of satisfaction is technical quality, although there are some elements of functional quality that may compensate for low technical quality, in particular a good relationship with the contact personnel of the service. Functional quality does, however, play a very important part in any overall assessment of quality.

Learning styles

Students have many other needs in relation to RBL, in particular relating to learning/study styles, and emotional (particularly peer group) support. Learning styles can be defined as people's characteristic ways of information processing, feeling, and behaving in and toward learning situations – in other words, those preferences, dispositions and tendencies that influence one's learning (Smith 1983, p60). Honey and Mumford (1982) have produced a simplistic but useful classification of learning styles. They contend that there are four basic styles, which are not mutually exclusive:

- activists (dynamic), who are dominated by immediate experiences, and are concerned with concrete tasks;
- reflectors (administrative), who stand back and ponder on experiences, who are concerned with practical applications, and concentrate on the rules and procedures;
- theorists (scientific), who are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories, models and systems thinking, and less concerned with personal aspects;
- pragmatists (individualistic), who search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with applications. They are more considerate of the personal aspects.

Study styles can be related closely to learning styles. Understanding the learning processes is

important in catering for student needs. Any evaluation by the college must examine all aspects of any process, working through the elements to discover where problems (or misunderstandings) are giving rise to dissatisfaction.

Learning resources

Another aspect that needs consideration in relation to quality of RBL provision is the resources from which the students learn. The debate between whether to purchase commercially available materials or to produce them in-house still rages in higher education circles, despite the fact that research shows that 'a separate facility for the production of learning resources runs the risk of expensive duplication of published resources....In addition it was found that in-house productions tended to be regarded by lecturers as their own personal teaching aids and were not made available in the library for use by students or colleagues,' (Downing 1991, p16).

The argument that in-house productions were preferable was quite forceful in further education in the past, and many production centres were set up for this purpose (and many of the publications sold commercially). The feeling now seems to be that in-house production cannot, on the whole, compete with commercially produced publications, except with enormous capital outlay for equipment and staff. Students need well produced learning resources, and since there has been a large increase in materials being written by college lecturers for commercial publishing houses, there is no shortage of suitable materials for students studying through RBL. Obviously there is nothing to prevent tutors from producing their own materials in-house, but these must be seen as a college resource, housed in the college library or resource centre.

Quality assurance is needed to pull together all the quality issues, and so provide a system of standards that assures that quality reflects the needs of clients. This will entail:

- identifying those features of a service which are of significance to users and their needs (e.g. that speed of service is important);
- assessing any problems or deficiencies which appear to exist with respect to those features (e.g. that there are frequent delays or long queues);
- implementing improvements (e.g. more staff, a more equal distribution of work between individual service providers);
- monitoring the situation (e.g. continuing, periodically at least, to measure delays and waiting times).

(Pollitt 1990, p437)

It is not necessary to go into any more detail here to indicate the importance of an understanding of student and tutor needs and of quality issues to make the best of the introduction of RBL to the college.

Implications for the college library

College libraries are among the most important providers of learning resources, and the foundation on which RBL operates. They act as both support to courses offered by the college, and assist in delivery of the curriculum, by providing information and an environment conducive to study by individuals with different learning/study styles. As libraries offer flexibility in dealing with individual needs, by open access provision of information and different study areas, they are the ideal environment for RBL. To summarise, the college library:

- supports and extends any curriculum already being presented throughout the college;
- provides access to other curricula not available elsewhere;
- supplements and extends learning opportunities by providing access to a range of alternative approaches through the whole range of media, from books to interactive video and CD-ROM;
- supports the college's attempts to break through the learning barriers of place, time, pace etc. for individuals.

But the library can only provide for students if there is adequate liaison between the library, the students and the tutors, and if the library is central to the decision-making process about the curriculum in the college. Unless the library is aware of what is going on in curriculum development, it cannot possibly fulfil its role of supporting and delivering

the curriculum. The college librarian must have a place on relevant committees, which should be complemented by grass roots liaison with tutors and students through user groups and similar fora.

With the introduction of RBL, close co-operation between the college library, the tutors (including senior college management) and the students is essential. For RBL to be successful and effective, there must be a partnership of mutual respect and understanding between all three parties.

The library will then become central to the learning process; but in order to do this, its primary function must be to provide a wide ranging service based on a comprehensive collection of learning resources (print-based, audio-visual, and computer-based). The learning resources need to be fully integrated so that they serve the needs of, and are appropriate to, the courses/subjects studied in the college. Due to the wide range of services and the comprehensiveness of its collection, libraries are almost inevitably complex and confusing systems.

In effect, this means that tutors (in particular) will need to be trained in how the library operates, what it can offer students, and their role in relation to the library and RBL. It also means training the students, in study skills generally, and in changing their pre-conceptions about the library to enable them to see the worth of an area they (or a large majority) consider irrelevant or even alien to their information needs and study styles.

Research undertaken by the writer found that 'boring' is far and away students' most frequent negative attitude towards libraries. When students are asked what 'boring' means in relation to the library, they usually reply that there is too much information; that it is overwhelming and irrelevant to their studies. They cannot relate to the role of the library; that students on other courses may require the information that they find unnecessary. Ways of counteracting this attitude are necessary if the students are not going to create their own barriers to using the library. One way to overcome the confusion of perceiving the library as a large disorganised (to them) collection of largely irrelevant information sources, is by 'user education', or training in its organisation and use. But this could be interpreted as a library-centred rather than a student-centred approach.

A better approach might be to consider changing the physical layout of the library, to come more into line with what the students need. This may entail creating discrete subject-orientated areas within one centralised area to give the students access to all areas of stock, with all the learning resources applicable to each subject in separate areas. There is a great deal of evidence to indicate that students prefer a more self-contained and subject dedicated environment. This layout would provide a much more flexible approach to the use of information, and with the introduction of RBL, tutors would find this arrangement more appropriate to their method of working with the students on a range of learning resources in their subject areas. Of course, library user education would still be required, and in fact would remain an essential element for the successful use of the library by the students.

The separation of the stock into subject areas would not negate the necessity for taking into account another important aspect of study styles: quiet versus active learning. Some students prefer to study in silence, with no distractions, and others (the majority of the 16-19 year old FE students) prefer a more active approach, working in groups and on equipment, such as video, computers, interactive video, CD-ROM. Separate areas for quiet and active learning should be provided to cater for the needs of the students. Group discussion and seminar rooms should also be provided for students who need to be even more 'active' in their involvement with a task.

The library staff themselves may also need some training, not only in how the library is organised, and the operation of the audio-visual machines and computers, but also in dealing with clients ('customer care'), bearing in mind that they are not just providing a service, but also 'selling' it. How they behave towards students and tutors may have a strong bearing on whether the clients actually return to use their service a second time.

For general resource provision (staff, finance, space, stock), there are college library guidelines including those written by the Library Association's Colleges of Further and Higher Education Group (1990) and Brewer (1988), based on the present situation throughout the country. These are useful indicators of where a particular library falls in relation to others within similar size colleges. It is to be hoped that any college library falls at least at the median,

and preferably at the 75 percentile in relating resources provision to other libraries.

Evaluation of the situation is, therefore, vitally important, both by using performance indicators and service quality analysis.

The performance indicators need to be chosen carefully, to reflect what is going on in the library, to act as comparisons with other colleges, and be easy to collect (i.e. not too time consuming or human resource intensive). Use of resources is an important area to cover, and the Council for National Academic Awards' recommended performance indicators for higher education libraries are as follows.

Library expenditure:
- per FTE member of staff;
- per FTE student;
- as a percentage of general expenditure;
- periodicals expenditure as a percentage of total;
- library pay expenditure as a percentage of total;
- book expenditure per FTE student;
- periodicals expenditure per FTE student.

(CNAA 1990, p25)

Another range of indicators derive from the library itself and how the students are using the services. Input, intermediate and output measures could be counted, and some relationships made between:

- number of staff;
- size of stock;
- its budget;
- issues of stock;
- gross number of students using the library per course or department (related to the gross numbers enrolled on the course or to the department);
- usage of the software (audio-visual and computer);
- the number of enquiries and requests handled;
- the utilisation of seating and space;
- time taken to supply requested items.

The future of the library as a focal point for RBL depends on a real understanding of all the elements of the service in relation to client needs. Service quality analysis should, therefore, also be carried out on all the aspects (technical and functional) to assess the barriers to successful use; from, for example, the 'friendliness' of the library staff to the ease of finding specific items in stock. The range of elements of the service is enormous, but all of them need scrutiny, and amending where necessary.

RBL and its implementation in an FE college

This section examines significant issues identified in earlier sections. Its intention is to enable a strategic plan for implementation to be formulated in any further education college (a sample plan is provided in the appendix).

The first pre-requisite for the successful introduction of RBL is a total commitment by senior college management, particularly the principalship. This commitment may entail taking decisions that carry a large element of risk. It may mean redeploying staff, utilising space and allocating finance in different ways, so that reversal to the old system at a later date is difficult. A gradual implementation is obviously preferable, so that the new systems can be evaluated and amended where necessary as they gain acceptance. This will mean, of course, that both RBL and 'traditional' forms of delivery will be running side by side for a considerable length of time, perhaps with different methods being used to teach the same course. When this is the case, an opportunity will exist to enable students to choose between the different methods provided that they are given all the information about the alternatives so that they can make informed decisions.

With any situation of change, the manager needs clearly to identify the issues and problems, create strategies for dealing with these issues and problems, and then draw together an action plan that provides a route to the resolution of the issues and problems, leading to a changed situation.

The issues and problems related to the implementation of RBL that have been highlighted so far are:

- partnership;
- quality issues;
- staff development;

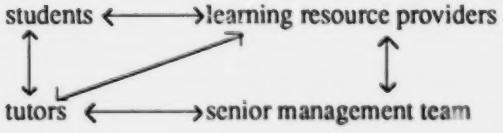
- student autonomy;
- the learning resources framework;
- the technology of delivery;
- introduction and use of forms of RBL;
- provision of RBL (study) guides.

Bearing in mind that introducing RBL is likely to require radical changes to the institution as a whole, any gradual move should initially involve some selected courses across the whole spectrum of courses. This would make it possible for some decisions about important issues and problems to be tackled at a later date (e.g. the layout of the library, the use of space across the college, and the extent and nature of an RBL framework).

Each issue or problem requires a strategy to deal with it, involving the fullest possible consultation with tutors, non-teaching staff, students and senior college management. The following section is based on case study material and looks at the issues and problems listed above in more detail to give an understanding of the complexity of the strategies that need to be formulated. Many of the issues, in reality, will be integrated with each other, and operate concurrently.

Partnership

Partnership should be viewed as the entitlement of each of the participants, with the senior management team (SMT) being an additional element:



as a result, the students, tutors and SMT should expect as a minimum from the learning resource providers (meaning systems, not individuals such as tutors):

- adequate and equitable access (physical, opening hours, psychological);
- adequate stock (up to date, quantity, quality, range);
- appropriate and adequate study/learning facilities (group, independent, related to study styles);
- systems for the adequate circulation of stock;
- adequate enquiry/information service;
- adequate information location systems;
- adequate co-operation with other providers, tutors, outside agencies;

The learning resource providers, students and tutors should expect as a minimum from the SMT:

- adequate resourcing (revenue, capital, staff);
- adequate space (particularly for learning resource providers);
- adequate co-operation;
- appropriate locations;
- adequate and appropriate management information and decision support systems;
- adequate support for staff development.

The students, learning resource providers and SMT should expect as a minimum from the tutors:

- adequate delivery of the curriculum;
- adequate assessments (in-course, APLA);
- adequate input to learning resource providers (taking into account subject expertise);
- adequate co-operation.

The tutors, learning resource providers and SMT should expect as a minimum from the students (usually proposed in a student contract):

- adequate commitment to learning;
- adequate conduct and behaviour;
- adequate co-operation (to evaluate their needs, with tutors and with learning resource providers).

If everyone is aware of their entitlement and this is agreed by all parties, then a partnership of mutual understanding and respect will be built up. Expectations are also realistic and known, so that participants are more likely to be satisfied.

Quality

Quality issues include the examination of all the possible RBL processes that students will go through to achieve their own goals. The processes needing close scrutiny include those in which students:

- negotiate their goals and learning activities;
- gain autonomy through structured programmes;
- find and use information in answer to their information problems;
- choose facilities in and with which to study and learn;
- receive the emotional support they need (particularly from peers);
- are assessed (self, peers, tutor, external).

Staff development

Staff development is crucial to the success of RBL. The whole issue of the changing role of tutors requires new attitudes and behaviour, a thorough understanding of new procedures and their assimilation into tutors' consciousness. Information skills and new techniques and processes for delivering the curriculum also need to be thoroughly rehearsed to overcome any fear or lack of trust in the new techniques. There also needs to be joint staff development with all staff involved in the provision of RBL – tutors, learning resource providers and SMT – to agree their entitlements and form real bonds of mutual respect.

The framework

Creating the learning resources framework requires decisions about what (and who) will be part of a framework of learning resources providers that the students can turn to, depending on their information requirements. The framework may include the college library, learning workshops, other RBL centres, the media centre, student services, study centres, audio-visual and computer facilities throughout the college, and tutors. The functioning and co-ordination of the framework is important to keep up to date with what each area can offer the RBL student, and to make each as accessible as possible.

Delivery

The technology of delivery is about how students are 'processed' as they go through the college system. Obviously the way they are treated as individual learners has a bearing on this and, therefore, the relationships between students and tutors, and how learning is structured via the tutors. But decisions also need to be made about:

- the utilisation of learning spaces: whether RBL creates a situation whereby the demand on the open-access spaces exceeds that on classrooms, so that the functions of rooms will need to change;
- whether certain learning resource providers (e.g. the college library) need to reassess how they provide their services, particularly in relation to the flexibility of their layout, and their role in relation to tutorial support for learners (e.g. what role do tutors have in facilitating learning within the learning resource centres, and how much do the learning resource centre staff enable the curriculum to be delivered?).

Student autonomy

Student autonomy requires the students to know and understand their role within the learning environment, self organisation, and information skills beyond what is presently expected of them. All of these will need to be 'taught' to students, both as separate entities and embedded within the delivery of their subjects. Making sure students become more autonomous may be one of the most difficult tasks of the tutor (although for many students studying under supported self study this has not proved to be a particularly difficult problem).

RBL guides

RBL guides, which enable the students to study independently or in small groups, should generally be bought in, and made available through the college library and learning workshops. There will, however, be cases where tutors should create their own, particularly guides to study, where students follow through subject areas by being referred to a wide variety of source material. Close co-operation between tutors and the learning resource providers should ensure that students gain access to all their requirements when they need them.

Selection and introduction of schemes

Selecting and introducing appropriate RBL schemes to the college will require some research into the available schemes, and adaptation where necessary. As has been mentioned, supported self study may prove to be a good starting point, but it needs a great deal of development before it becomes the perfect RBL vehicle.

Once the objectives, in the form of the issues and problems, have been identified, the strategic plans for each of the issues and problems need to be formulated. This means examining where the college is now (the present situation), where it wants to get to (the objectives), and how it can get from its current position to the desired position.

An outline of the college's ultimate destination has been given in the previous pages, as well as details of some of the changes that need to take place across the college. The college library has an important role in contributing to an overall strategy of enabling change towards whole-college RBL. Any strategy that the college library may propose relies on senior management in the college having taken decisions appropriate to the whole issue. These will include the use of current validation and course monitoring and review procedures through appropriate committees to look at the processes and quality standards of courses that will be delivered by RBL, and to select pilot courses to be delivered by RBL.

Where college senior management actively support the introduction of RBL, the college library can form its own strategy that knits in with the overall college plans. This library strategy, co-ordinated, negotiated and monitored by the senior librarian who also follows through any action required, should help the college move towards RBL. The following, most of which should be offered concurrently, is proposed as initial actions and programmes to achieve this.

- Provide short structured courses for tutors on how to build a course from commercially available and self-produced materials. This should, if possible, by delivered in a RBL format, including self-assessment.

- Provide structured courses for students on coping with alternative methods of study, particularly information location and use, delivered if possible in a RBL format.

- Negotiate with specific tutors to provide structured study guides for particular courses, for students who may have been ill, missed parts of the course, or for those whose subjects clash on their timetables.

- Negotiate to offer self-study modules and structured study guides to students of selected tutors who feel they have not the time to teach the whole course effectively.

- Establish a library 'user group' of supportive lecturers to work out, for example, an effective strategy for outreach operation and support that the library might adopt.

- Negotiate and obtain senior management team support for a transfer of resourses to enable the growth of RBL through more learning resources and space.

- Obtain senior management team support to enable tutors to be timetabled into the library as learning facilitators and tutorial support.

- Obtain senior management team support and resources for the necessary changes to the library's layout and service provision.

- Set up a system to be co-ordinated by the library whereby bought-in RBL packages are assessed by tutors.

Each college will need to formulate its own plans, based on its current positions and other internal factors. Much of this paper has been based on experience and case study. In the case study college the RBL group has been formed. It now needs to discuss the whole issue and formulate an overall strategic plan, including a detailed action plan, bearing in mind any resource constraints. This should then be discussed at the most senior levels. Total commitment from the college governors and senior management team is essential if its implementation is to be successful, but then ultimately a similar commitment will be required from the tutors, the learning resource providers, and the students for it to work.

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Appendix 1

Blackburn College Library resource-based learning – proposed 5 year strategic plan

The following is an outline of the proposed 5 year plan developed by Blackburn College for the implementation and continued monitoring of resource-based learning. It is included here as an aid for other colleges wishing to implement an RBL scheme. Many of the factors need to be reassessed and continued each year.

Stage 1: September 1991 - August 1992

- Subscribe to the Further Education Consortium Units (£5000 + £1000)
- Agree where the consortium materials are to be stored, and how they are to be used.

Stage 2: September 1992-August 1993

- Appoint an RBL manager, and one support person. Allocate them a place in the library and make the library the centre for RBL developments.

- Establish an RBL practitioner group (primarily tutors) and an RBL users' group (primarily students) both chaired by the RBL manager.

- Urgently develop RBL in A level, TVEI, ABE/ESoL, and other areas identified by the RBL manager.

- Start staff development using action learning techniques. This should involve all those staff already involved in RBL and others on the fringes about to take the plunge. (At this stage there is no need to separate tutors responsible for curriculum design and development from instructors, responsible for curriculum delivery.)
  The following areas need to be covered:
  a) partnership entitlements, whereby the entitlements of all those involved in RBL are agreed (the student agreement already exists but will need to be examined in the light of RBL developments);
  b) individual action planning, self organisation and information skills (mainly to pass on to students in induction);
  c) delivery techniques (to the student as an individual autonomous learner);
  d) group work with autonomous learners;
  e) counselling;
  f) using and adapting commercially produced RBL materials;
  g) creating RBL materials.

- Devise and deliver student training for RBL, which must be given at the beginning of each course. This should include the students role and responsibilities (including the student agreement), their self organisation, locating and using information, and individual action planning (other learning and study skills should be integrated into the course delivery and assessed accordingly).

- Identify faculty-based and cross-college RBL centres (the RBL framework). The RBL manager should liaise with those responsible. Start building and adaptation work.

- Start the audit of the RBL framework and record all the learning resources available (the library's automated system may need to be changed to a system compatible with the college's network for full utilisation of the information).

- Draw up a timetable (annually) of the availability of drop-in access to all areas in the framework.

- Devise and cost automated recording systems. Look into and devise a flexible timetabling system.

- Refine the mechanism for making tutors aware of the study guides and other RBL materials available, using the library to disseminate this information.

- Create a system, focused on the library, for evaluating study guides and other RBL materials.

Stage 3: September 1993 - August 1994

- Reduce class contact of all long programmes by 10 per cent (73 hours).

- Introduce RBL to at least 20 per cent short programmes, with 10 per cent reduction in class contact, and with appropriate staff development.

- Introduce flexible timetables.

- Look into and devise a flexible college-wide rooming system.

- Introduce the new automated recording, system.

- Introduce 'instructors' to about 10 per cent of all long programmes.

- Examine carefully the processes that enable successful RBL and client (student, tutor, employer) satisfaction, for example:
  a) information given to students prior to entry to a course delivered in an RBL format;
  b) entry on to courses delivered in an RBL format;
  c) induction within courses;
  d) how students negotiate goals and learning activities;
  e) how students are encouraged to gain autonomy;
  f) methods whereby students acquire study skills;
  g) how students find and use information;
  h) how students choose the facilities they need;
  i) how students get the emotional support they need, particularly peer group support, but also in-course counselling;
  j) how students are assessed;
  k) whether the size, design and layout of spaces is appropriate to RBL;

Stage 4: September 1994 - August 1995

- Reduce class contact of all long programmes by 15 per cent (109 hours).
- Reduce class contact in 50 per cent of all short programmes by 15 per cent.
- Introduce instructors to about 20 per cent of all long programmes.

Stage 5: September 1995 - August 1996

- Reduce class contact of all long programmes by 25 per cent (183 hours).
- Reduce class contact in 75 per cent of all short programmes by 25 per cent.

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